

Online master's degrees may alter higher ed

By Tamar Lewin, New York Times

Next January, the Georgia Institute of Technology plans to offer a master's degree in computer science through massive open online courses for a fraction of the on-campus cost, a first for an elite institution. If it even approaches its goal of drawing thousands of students, it could signal a change to the landscape of higher education.

From their start two years ago, when a free artificial intelligence course from Stanford enrolled 170,000 students, free massive open online courses, or MOOCs, have drawn millions and yielded results like the perfect scores of Battushig, a 15-year-old Mongolian boy, in a tough electronics course offered by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

But the courses have not yet produced profound change, partly because they offer no credit and do not lead to a degree. The disruption may be approaching, though, as Georgia Tech, which has one of the country's top computer science programs, plans to offer a MOOC-based online master's degree in computer science for \$6,600 – far less than the \$45,000 on-campus price.

Zvi Galil, the dean of the university's College of Computing, expects that in the coming years, the program could attract up to 10,000 students annually, many from outside the United States and some who would not complete the full master's degree. "Online, there's no visa problem," he said.

The program rests on an unusual partnership forged by Galil and Sebastian Thrun, a founder of Udacity, a Silicon Valley provider of the open online courses.

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